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October 24th: 2 Kings 13 & Acts 3:1—4:4

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The death of Elisha. The raising of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

2 Kings 13. In the twenty-third year of Joash the son of Ahaziah king of Judah, Jehoahazd the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and he reigned seventeen years. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin.

He did not depart from them. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them continually into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-Hadad the son of Hazael. Then Jehoahazd sought the favor of the Lord, and the Lord listened to him, for he saw the oppression of Israel, how the king of Syria oppressed them.

Therefore the Lord gave Israel a savior, so that they escaped from the hand of the Syrians, and the people of Israel lived in their homes as formerly. Nevertheless, they did not depart from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, which he made Israel to sin, but

walked in them, and the Asherah also remained in Samaria. For there was not left to Jehoahazd an army of more than fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen, for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and made them like dust at threshing.

Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahazd, and all that he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? So Jehoahazd slept with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria, and Joash his son reigned in his place. In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoahazd the son of Jehoahazd began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and he reigned sixteen years. He also did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin, but he walked in them.

Now the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, and the might with which he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? So Joash slept with his fathers, and Jeroboam sat on his throne, and Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel. Now when Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of which he was to die, Joash king of Israel went down to him and wept before him, crying, My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen. And Elisha said to him, Take a bow and arrows.

So he took a bow and arrows. Then he said to the king of Israel, Draw the bow. And he drew it.

And Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands. And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it.

Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The Lord's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Syria, for you shall fight the Syrians in Aphek until you have made an end of them.

And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, Strike the ground with them.

And he struck three times and stopped. Then the man of God was angry with him and said, You should have struck five or six times. Then you would have struck down Syria until you had made an end of it.

But now you will strike down Syria only three times. So Elisha died and they buried him. Now bands of Moabites used to invade the land in the spring of the year.

And as a man was being buried, behold, a marauding band was seen. And the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha. And as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet.

Now Hazael, king of Syria, oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion on them. And he turned toward them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, nor has he cast them from his presence until now.

When Hazael, king of Syria, died, Benhadad, his son, became king in his place. Then Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz, took again from Benhadad the son of Hazael the cities that he had taken from Jehoahaz his father in war. Three times Jehoash defeated him and recovered the cities of Israel.

After the Lord had judged the Amorite dynasty and the idolatry and the wickedness of both the northern and southern kingdoms, we now find ourselves largely in the aftermath, and in chapter 13 the nation of Israel sinks to its sorriest condition yet. The twenty-third year of Jehoash of Judah was the year that he addressed the failure to advance the repairs of the temple and the mismanagement of the priests. It was also the year in which Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, came to the throne of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Jehu had received a promise from the Lord concerning his dynasty in chapter 10 verse 30. And the Lord said to Jehu, Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel. Nevertheless, Jehoahaz walks in the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, like all the other kings of Israel.

God had promised that he would judge his people Israel by means of Elisha, Hazael, and Jehu, and the failure of Jehu and his descendants to walk in the way of the Lord meant that the judgment would come from Hazael and Elisha. Hazael and Benhadad his son ravaged the northern kingdom. Jehoahaz is left with only the smallest rump of an army, a mere fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen.

But Jehoahaz sought the favour of the Lord, and the Lord took compassion upon him and upon Israel, and raised up a deliverer for them. This probably recalls for us the stories of the judges, where the people would lapse into idolatry and would be ravaged by their enemies, only for them to call upon the name of the Lord and some deliverer to be raised up. Various suggestions of the identity of this deliverer have been suggested.

Elisha, Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz, and even Adad-Nerari the third of Assyria, who by attacking the Arameans gave Israel some relief from their assaults. Jehoash or Joash of Israel succeeds his father Jehoahaz. Once again he follows in the way of Jeroboam.

He also fights against the southern kingdom. If we pay attention to the numbers, it should be clear that many of the kings were co-regents for a period of time with their predecessors. Jehoash is one example of this.

Jehoahaz comes to the throne in the twenty-third year of Joash. He reigns for seventeen years. And then Jehoash of Israel, the son of Jehoahaz, becomes the king in the thirty-seventh year of Joash, king of Judah.

There is clearly an overlap in their reigns of about two years or more. Elisha's ministry had begun back in 1 Kings chapter 19 during the reign of Ahab. His prophetic ministry had spanned almost fifty years and included within it the reign of Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and now it was ending in the reign of Jehoash.

Jehoash of Israel, whose death we have just read about, went down to visit the dying Elisha and was distraught at his passing. Elisha represented the Lord's presence with his people, the Lord fighting for his people. His response to the dying Elisha is, My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen.

These are the same words that Elisha had used of the passing of Elijah back in chapter 2. Chariots of the Lord had associated with Elijah and Elisha in chapter 2 and chapter 6 and then in chapter 7 as well, as the sound of the chariots had driven away the besieging Syrians. The king rightly recognises Elisha as a father figure. Elisha is the prophetic leader of the people.

The fact that he is going to depart at such a low point in the nation's history is of great concern for the king who faces serious threats on the borders. Who is going to fight for Israel now? In answer to such concerns, Elisha gives two signs to the worried king. For the first of the two signs, he is instructed to take a bow and some arrows and drawing the bow to shoot it out of the window eastward.

Firing the arrow in the direction of Syria with the prophet's hand upon his, the king has an assurance of his victory over them. He will fight against Syria and he will be victorious against them. He will fight the Syrians in Aphek and he will make an end of them.

The Aphek mentioned here is not the Aphek of 1 Samuel chapter 4, the battle of Aphek being the battle at which the Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines. This Aphek is towards the south east of Galilee. This first prophetic sign is followed by another.

In the second he must take the arrows again and then he is instructed to strike the ground with them. But he only does so three times and he stops. And Elisha is angry with him.

Joash should have struck the ground five or six times. Perhaps the difference lay in the fact that now Elisha's hands were not accompanying his upon the bow. Joash would still win great victories over the Syrians, but they would not be as decisive as they could have been.

Elisha died, was buried, and his body decomposed leaving only his bones. Some time

later a body was thrown into his grave and the body came to life. This should not be seen merely as a random miracle.

It's a sign that Elisha's power, his word, the way in which God was working through him, was still powerful within Israel. Implicit in this miracle is a promise for life from death for those who are associated with the prophet. If they cling to the words of the prophets there will be life from death even in the grave of exile.

The chapter ends with continued struggles against the Syrians. Hazael and his son Ben-Hadad continue to fight against Israel. However God has mercy upon Israel.

On account of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob he does not cast his presence away from them and he does not destroy them. He also empowers Joash according to the word of Elisha to take back some of the lost territory recapturing from Ben-Hadad some of the cities that his father had lost in war. This is a rare occasion in the story of Israel where the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is mentioned.

A question to consider, what lessons may we learn from God's merciful dealings with an unfaithful Israel during this period of its history? Acts chapter 3 verse 1 to chapter 4 verse 4. Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour, and a man lame from birth was being carried whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the beautiful gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple he asked to receive alms and Peter directed his gaze at him as did John and said, look at us and he fixed his attention on them expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, I have no silver and gold but what I do have I give to you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

And he took him by the right hand and raised him up and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong and leaping up he stood and began to walk and enter the temple with them walking and leaping and praising God and all the people saw him walking and praising God and recognized him as the one who sat at the beautiful gate of the temple asking for alms and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. While he clung to Peter and John all the people utterly astounded ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's and when Peter saw it he addressed the people, men of Israel why do you wonder at this or why do you stare at us as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers glorified his servant Jesus whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate when he had decided to release him but you denied the holy and righteous one and asked for a murderer to be granted to you and you killed the author of life whom God raised from the dead to this we are witnesses and his name by faith in his name has made this man strong whom you see and know and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the

presence of you all and now brothers i know that you acted in ignorance as did also your rulers but what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets that his Christ would suffer he thus fulfilled repent therefore and turn back that your sins may be blotted out that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and that he may send the Christ appointed for you Jesus whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago Moses said the Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers you shall listen to him in whatever he tells you and it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people and all the prophets who have spoken from Samuel and those who came after him also proclaim these days you are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers saying to Abraham and in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed God having raised up his servant sent him to you first to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness and as they were speaking to the people the priests and the captains of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead and they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day for it was already evening but many of those who had heard the word believed and the number of the men came to about five thousand the events of Pentecost were a witness to the resurrection and the ascension of Christ and the witness of the apostles continues in chapter three and four with a witness to the power of Christ's name the power of Christ's name is a witness to the fact that he is above all principalities and powers all authority has been given to him and the apostles who act with the power and the authorization of this name can do mighty deeds with it beyond this development of the early church's witness there is also a gradual movement towards increasing forms of persecution in the previous chapter the disciples had been marked by some of the people who had witnessed them speaking in tongues but now they will be arrested and imprisoned by the authorities the story begins with Peter and John going to the temple at the hour of prayer the ninth hour the hour of prayer was associated with the hour of incense this hour was also an hour that was important in Luke chapter one where Zachariah was serving in the temple at the hour of incense while the multitude of the people were praying later on we'll also see Cornelius praying at this time prayer in the temple was a feature of the early church's practice although the lord was establishing a new temple through his people after Pentecost they were still worshipping at the old temple as well there were overlapping administrations for this period of time the early Jerusalem church met from house to house but it also met on a regular basis in the temple seemingly in Solomon's portico this was a covered porch that would afford some sort of shelter and shade and would have been a very good location for semi-public meetings we read about the early church's practice of prayer in the temple first in Luke chapter 24 verses 52 to 53 and they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God the hour of prayer or the ninth hour was about three in the afternoon and this was one of the two hours of prayer of the day the other being nine in the morning it was also the

time of Jesus' death while we were accustomed to see the three core disciples Peter James and John here we have Peter and John and they are paired here in chapter 4 and then also in chapter 8 verse 14 they seem to have a particularly close relationship we see this also in the gospel of John especially in the concluding chapters where Peter and John are juxtaposed with each other in a number of different ways the lame man is outside of the temple perhaps he's not able to get in but more likely he's seeking alms from worshippers at one of the points of entry concern for the poor and needy was one of the things expected of the people of God so it is understandable that the lame man would see this as a promising place to beg it isn't entirely clear what gate the beautiful gate was modern scholars more commonly identify this as the Nicanor gate but we cannot be certain the Shushan gate at the east is the more common traditional suggestion and would fit best with Ezekiel chapter 47 verses 1-2 the lame man requests alms from Peter and John Peter is the one who responds throughout the book of Acts Peter is generally the speaking character of the apostles he responds saying that they don't have silver and gold regular money but he has something even better in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth he instructs him to rise up and walk he takes the man's hand he lifts him up and immediately the Lord gives strength to his feet and his ankles the man's leaping recalls the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 35 verses 5-6 then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped then shall the lame man leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute sing for joy in raising him up in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth there's a demonstration of the authority and the power of Christ through the miracle Peter is confident in the power of the name of Christ and he appeals to Christ's authority in doing this act such healings more generally serve as a testimony to the authority of Christ and to the truth of the apostles message signs and miracles accompanying the apostles message was a seal of the Lord upon the truth of what they were declaring the people see him walking and praising God and they are astonished they recognize that this is the same man lame from birth whom they have seen at the gate of the temple many many times before they see the lame man praising God much as the disciples had praised God following the descent of the spirit on the day of Pentecost there the astonishment was that it was done in tongues not their own and here the astonishment is that a man lame from birth has been raised up in this sort of way perhaps their minds turn to the prophecy of Isaiah and think that this must be a sign of the kingdom the miracle also recalls miracles that Christ had performed Christ had declared that his disciples would perform miracles greater than his they are continuing his ministry and much as Elisha had continued the ministry of Elijah doubling the number of signs that he had performed so the ministry of Jesus is continued in the ministry of his disciples acting in the name of their master it is Christ that is doing the sign it is Christ that is showing the power in Luke chapter 5 verses 17 to 26 Jesus had forgiven and raised a paralyzed man in John chapter 5 he had raised up a man at the sheep pool seeing this miraculous sign the people all run together to the portico of Solomon presumably this is the place where Peter and John were going to pray perhaps they were meeting other members of the church there and might afterwards be teaching the

people seeing the multitude running to them Peter delivers a sermon to the crowd the miracle provides an occasion for explaining what God has done in Christ a demonstration of his power and once again a demonstration of the authority and the truth of Christ the people addressed are addressed as men of Israel and that will be important for a lot of the content of Peter's message here he will appeal to them as people who have received the promises that were given in Abraham as those who have heard the words of Moses and the words of the prophets the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God of Abraham the God of Isaac the God of Jacob the God of their fathers from the very outset he wants them to know that this is their Messiah that God has raised up this is not just a random person this is the one that was promised for them and yet the very one that was sent for them they delivered over and denied they denied him and giving him over to Pilate and insisting that he be killed and they denied him and choosing a murderer over him Peter refers to Jesus using key Old Testament terms he is called the servant he is the one who is foretold in the prophecies of Isaiah he is the holy and the righteous one the righteous one again was mentioned in Isaiah chapter 53 and elsewhere he is the servant the holy one the righteous one and also the author of life as either the prince of life or the author of life he is the origin of life he's the one who gives life he has life in himself naturally it would seem to be a futile endeavor to try and kill this one indeed God raised him from the dead and the disciples and their mighty works witnessed to this fact that this has indeed taken place the raising up of the lame man was not achieved by some miraculous power on the part of Peter and John it was achieved through the power of Christ's name and more particularly through the authority of Christ it was by faith in this name by faith in Christ's authority and power and goodness that the man was raised up the raising up of the man demonstrates not only then the power of Christ but the efficacy of a faith that calls upon Jesus in the book of Acts there are a number of occasions where we see a sort of two visitation paradigm most clearly in the speech of Stephen a deliverer visits the first time and is rejected and then comes again and is either accepted leading to great blessing for those who accept him or he is rejected leading to their doom Peter declares that the people acted in ignorance they did not truly know who this one was they did not realize that he was the one promised for them that he was the servant of the Lord throughout the gospels there's been this element of a secret character to Christ's mission many scholars speak of the messianic secret especially in the gospel of Mark the full identity of Christ is not truly revealed until the very end it is only after the resurrection that we begin to understand who Jesus Christ really was what they did beforehand then was an act of ignorance on the cross Christ had called out for their forgiveness because they did not know what they were doing and now they do know they have the chance to repent the chance to turn it is noteworthy that Peter particularly emphasizes the theme of denial they denied the Holy One the Righteous One the one that was sent for them as the servant of the Lord this was the key sin of course that Peter himself had committed he had denied Christ three times and now he is the one who was sent bearing the message that the people who have denied Christ can be forgiven that sin he particularly addresses the multitude here the rulers

were in great sin but the multitude bore their responsibility even though they were whipped up they played a very instrumental and willing part in condemning Christ to his crucifixion however what they did was not outside the purposes of God God foretold all of this by the mouth of the prophets we might think about passages such as Isaiah 53 the Christ would suffer and now God has fulfilled it and they are now given the chance to repent if they turn back their sins will be forgiven them they will receive the benefits of the new covenant and times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord this is an unusual expression but it seems to envisage some eschatological restoration of Israel if they respond to their Messiah if they receive him then the fullness of the promised kingdom will be realized this is of course conditional if they do not repent they will not receive this we find this elsewhere in the New Testament particularly in places like Romans chapter 11 where the expectation is that when Israel responds to the gospel it will be the full flowering and realization of God's purpose the Messiah has been appointed for them and if they repent the Messiah will be sent to them to bless them however until the time for the restoration of all things has come Christ will remain in heaven this restoration of all things has been foretold by the prophets throughout the Old Testament while many of the promises of the prophets are fulfilled in the church many of them do look forward to something beyond that to the restoration and the blessing of Israel to the grafting in again of the natural branches as the apostle Paul might put it perhaps one of the biggest questions that's hovering over the whole of the book of Acts is will God restore at this time the kingdom to Israel the apostles hope that the people of Israel will respond believing that if they do the time for the fullness of the blessing will have come however as long as they fail to respond something crucially important still has not been realized as we go through the book of Acts we'll see that the vast majority of the Jews save for a small remnant do not respond positively to the gospel message the disciples end up turning to the Gentiles and all of this creates a very keen problem that Paul must address within the book of Romans and elsewhere how can we account for the failure of Israel and what hope remains for them as Stephen will later do in his speech Peter here refers to the prophecy of Deuteronomy chapter 18 where God promised that he would raise up a prophet like Moses from among their brothers the response positive or negative to this prophet would be decisive for the fate of the people to whom he was sent not only that but this prophet was testified to by all of the prophets every single one of the prophets from Samuel and those who came after him all spoke about these days that have come upon them this is not just one more event within Israel's history this is the climactic event this is the event that it was all leading up to in raising the Messiah from the dead and exalting him to his right hand God had marked out this one this Jesus of Nazareth as the one that all must listen to as the one with all authority and power to whom all knees must bow and every tongue must confess the destiny of the entire people rests upon his shoulders and if the people are to be saved it is upon him that they must call he is the one through whom all of the nations will be blessed this is going to be a fulfillment of the promise of Abraham but they are the sons of the prophets they are the sons of the covenant God made the promises to their

fathers and they are the ones consequently that God has sent this message to first God has raised up his servant and he gives them the opportunity to repent to turn to be forgiven all of their sins and to be brought into the path of life the response of the authorities to the message of Peter is an angry one throughout the gospels we see the fear that the authorities had about the crowd and the very great concern to maintain control over them one of the particular concerns here is that the apostles are teaching the doctrine of resurrection the Sadducees in particular regarded this as a pharisaic innovation and they opposed the doctrine and the fact that the early church taught this doctrine in the context of its witness to Christ's resurrection was a cause of great concern and annoyance to them they put Peter and John in prison however the movement of the early church is already getting out of their control as people heard the word and saw the miracles they believed and the number of the men came to about 5 000 perhaps we might be reminded here of the feeding of the 5 000 in which 5 000 people were committed to the charge of the apostles after the apostles had returned from their ministry of announcing the coming of the kingdom to the towns and villages Christ had instructed them to feed the flock of the 5 000 and now they have a new flock perhaps the earlier multitude with 5 000 men anticipates this multitude with 5 000 men from the way that Christ had empowered them miraculously to feed that multitude he would empower them to feed this multitude also a question to consider what parallels can you see between the account of the raising of the lame man in this chapter and the raising of the lame man in acts chapter 14 verses 8 to 10 what lessons might Luke be wanting to convey through this